

**CLAIMS:**

1. A method of distribution of digitized information comprising:
  - (a) receiving at a local site a request from a customer for electronically-  
readable media containing customer-selected information;
  - (b) either before or after receipt of the request, obtaining a unique  
release code electronically from a remote site;
  - (c) associating the release code with the customer; and
  - (d) at the local site, storing on the media the customer-selected  
information, along with the release code, for supply to the customer.
2. A method as claimed in claim 1 in which the media includes packaging;  
the release code includes a licence number; and in which the licence number is  
printed onto the packaging.
3. A method as claimed in claim 2 in which the customer's name is printed  
onto the packaging.
4. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the  
release code is electronically stored on the media along with the customer-  
selected information.
5. A method as claimed in claim 4 in which information representative of  
the customer is electronically stored on the media.
6. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the  
media is a CD or a DVD; the release code includes a licence number; and in

which the licence number is printed onto the surface of the CD or DVD.

7. A method as claimed in claim 6 in which the customer's name is printed onto the surface of the CD.

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8. A method as claimed in any preceding claim including producing a certificate of authenticity at the local site containing the release code.

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9. A method as claimed in claim 8 including adding the customer's name to the certificate of authenticity.

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10. A method as claimed in claim 1 including receiving from the customer at the local site a user-defined media personalisation, and adding the personalisation to the media.

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11. A method as claimed in claim 10 in which the media includes packaging, and in which the personalisation is printed onto the packaging.

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12. A method as claimed in claim 10 and claim 11 in which the personalisation is electronically stored on the media along with the customer-selected information.

13. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the release code is issued at the remote site and is sent electronically to the local site on receipt of the customer request.

14. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims further including

storing at the local site a plurality of customer requests, receiving at the remote site the plurality of customer requests; and issuing from the remote site and sending to the local site a plurality of release codes in response to the plurality of customer requests.

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15. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 12 in which a plurality of release codes is issued at the remote site and transmitted electronically in advance to the local site, one of said release codes being associated with the customer on receipt of the customer request.

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16. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 12 including keeping a cumulative record at the local site of all supplied media and associated release codes, and forwarding the record electronically to the remote site.

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17. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 12 in which the customer request is made by a customer physically present at the local site.

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18. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 16 in which the customer request is made by a customer not physically present at the local site, via a communications medium, with the media being prepared at the local site for later collection by or delivery to the customer.

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19. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims further including receiving a request from the customer for a student sale, the request including a student number; validating the student number with reference to a representation of valid student numbers; and authorising the student sale depending upon the validation.

20. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims further including receiving a request from the customer for an upgrade sale, the request including a previous licence number; validating the previous licence number with reference to a representation of valid previous licence numbers; and  
5 authorising the upgrade sale depending upon the validation.

21. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims further including storing at the local and/or remote site a code; and precoding the media with the code before storage of the customer selected information.  
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22. A method as claimed in claim 21 in which the code is unique to the fulfilment unit.

23. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims further including receiving from the customer a request including a user-defined selection of products; and storing at the local site the request for user-defined selection of products for access by the customer.  
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24. A method as claimed in claim 22, in which the user-defined selection of products comprises a gift list.  
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25. A method as claimed in claim 22, in which the user-defined selection of products comprises a list compiled by an educational establishment.

25 26. Apparatus for the distribution of digitized information comprising:  
(a) a local mass store for storing the digitized information;  
(b) a point of sale unit arranged to receive a request from a customer for

electronically-readable media containing customer-selected information;

(c) a remote licensing control centre arranged to issue a unique release code electronically; and

5 (d) a local media generator arranged to store on the media the customer-selected information, along with the issued release code for supply to the customer.

10 27. Apparatus as claimed in claim 26 in which the release code includes a licence number; and in which there is further included a packaging generator arranged to print the licence number or the customer's name, or both onto media packaging.

15 28. Apparatus as claimed in claim 26 or claim 27 in which the release code includes a licence number; and in which there is further included a certificate of authenticity generator arranged to generate a certificate of authenticity including the licence number or the customer's name, or both

20 29. Apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 26 to 28 in which the media generator is arranged to include user-defined personalisation on the surface of the media, or within the digitized information stored on the media.

25 30. Apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 26 to 29 in which the media generator includes a CD or DVD writer.

31. Apparatus as claimed in claim 30 in which the release code includes a licence number, and in which the media generator includes a printer arranged to

print onto a surface of a CD the licence number or the customer's name.

32. A method of distribution of digitized information comprising;

- 5 (a) storing partly at a local site and partly at a remote site customer-selectable digitized information such that an individual customer selection will include at least a portion of the information which is stored at the remote site;
- 10 (b) receiving at the local site a request from a customer for electronically-readable media containing customer-selected information;
- (c) either before or after receipt of the request, authorising release of the customer-selected information and transmitting the said portion of the information from the remote site to the local site; and
- 15 (d) at the local site storing on the media the customer-selected information including the said portion.

33. A method as claimed in claim 32 in which the customer-selected information will, when read or used without the said portion, indicate to a user that the said portion has been omitted.

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34. A method as claimed in claim 33 in which the customer-selected information comprises a data file, and in which the said portion comprises a portion of that data file.

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35. A method as claimed in claim 34 in which the customer-selected information comprises a computer program and in which the said portion comprises a portion of that program without which the program will not run

either at all or as expected.

36. A method as claimed in claim 35 in which the said portion is an executable of the program.

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37. A method as claimed in claim 35 in which the said portion is a graphic of the program.

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38. A method as claimed in claim 35 in which, without the said portion, the program executes with a graphic which indicates that the program is not approved.

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39. A method as claimed in claim 38 in which the said portion is a graphic which, in use, overwrites the graphic which indicates that the program is not approved.

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40. Apparatus for the distribution of digitized information comprising:

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- (a) a local mass store and a remote mass store, customer-selectable digitized information being stored partly on the local mass store and partly on the remote mass store, such that an individual customer-selection will include at least a portion of the information which is stored on the remote mass store;
- (b) a point of sale unit for receiving a request from a customer for electronically-readable media containing customer-selected information;
- (c) an information release authoriser arranged to authorise release of the customer-selected information to the customer, and including means

for transmitting the said portion of the information from the remote mass store; and

- (d) a local media generator arranged to store on the media the customer-selected information including the said transmitted portion.

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41. A method of distribution of digitized information comprising;
- (a) receiving a request from a customer for electronically-readable media containing customer-selected information; and
- (b) storing the information on the media such that at least some of the information is stored on final storage segments of the media, with at least some other storage segments being unused for storage of the information.

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42. A method as claimed in claim 41 in which the final storage segments comprise outer storage tracks of the media.

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43. A method as claimed in claim 41 in which the information is stored on a media of greater than standard length.

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44. A method as claimed in claim 41 in which the media is a CD or a DVD.

45. A method of distribution of digitized information substantially as specifically described, with reference to the drawing.

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46. Apparatus for the distribution of digitized information substantially as specifically described, with reference to the drawing.



47. A method of processing returns of physical media from customers, the physical media storing customer-selected information, the method comprising:

- (a) accepting at a local site a returned media from a customer;
- (b) reading from the returned media an electronic licence code which is stored upon it;
- (c) reporting the licence code to a central site; and
- (d) electronically invalidating the returned media at the local site.

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48. A method as claimed in claim 47 in which the licence code is checked for validity before the return is authorised.

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49. A method as claimed in claim 47 in which the licence code is checked to ensure that a media having such a code has not previously been accepted for return before the return is authorised.

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